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ABSTRACT

This review analyzes the impact of the traditional school reform model on students who are "at-risk" and disabled. Several goals of current reform initiatives are felt to be exclusionary, such as specifying national or state goals for student achievement, establishing rigid graduation requirements, and relieving schools from "burdensome regulations." Advocates for persons with disabilities, both parents and professionals, must shape school reform in a way that will meet the needs of all students. An inclusionary model of school reform is proposed which is intended to provide a positive educational experience leading to productive lives for all students. The inclusionary approach stresses acceptance of the value of each student regardless of academic ability, social behavior, race, class, or any other label. The model calls for effective instruction, effective schools, exit criteria that reinforce productive school learning, curriculum alternatives, and building-based leadership. The focus of special educators on the narrow issue of least restrictive environment as opposed to the broader issue of school reform is discussed. Approaches to teacher preparation are presented that are based on the inclusionary model of school reform. Includes 35 references. (JDD)

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SPECIAL EDUCATION AND SCHOOL REFORM

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SPECIAL EDUCATION AND SCHOOL REFORM

The decade of the 1980's saw education soaring toward the top of the national agenda. Many voices were raised and comprehensive reports on the "state of education" gave schools failing grades. Recommendations were made encouraging the development of new models which would provide information and tools for future economic and technological survival (Hagarty and Abramson, 1987). We elected George Bush, the self-proclaimed "Education President", who called for the creation of national education goals and specific expectations for student performance. Yet ever as we design new models and formulate new goals, our school population becomes increasingly diverse, a school population that by the end of this decade will be more than one third Black, Hispanic or Asian, and include one quarter who live in poverty (Lisi, 1989). Our numbers of students "at-risk" have skyrocketed, and therefore, the issue of educational equity must be addressed if we are to design appropriate school options for all students.

As the future of schools was debated, special educators too often stood on the sidelines. Only in the latter half of the decade did special educators join in. Rather than deal with school reform as a whole, special educators focused on Will's (1986) Regular Education Initiative (REI) regarding the integration of children with handicaps into the mainstream. Although no one would deny the on-going importance of teaching

students with handicaps in the least restrictive environment (LRE), the discussion of REI was tremendously divisive (Sapon-Shevin, 1988). As special educators and their advocacy groups became increasingly polarized for or against "total integration", school reform moved forward without them.

This review of school reform will critically analyze the impact of the traditional school reform model on students who are "at-risk" and disabled. An inclusionary model of school reform is proposed which is intended to provide a positive educational experience leading to productive lives for all students. The focus of special educators on the narrow issue of least restrictive environment as opposed to the broader issues of school reform is discussed. Approaches to teacher preparation are presented which are based on the inclusionary model of school reform.

Special Education and School Reform

The group dealing with reform in the schools at the Forum on Emerging Trends in Special Education and Implications for Training Personnel began with a review of current thinking on school reform. The traditional view of school reform was found to be both pervasive and exclusionary. Felt (1985) in her review of reports on educational reform identified a number of basic themes which focused on this exclusionary perspective:

1. Goals - specifying national and state goals for student achievement;

2. Assessment - using normative tests to measure student performance against those goals;

3. Academic Standards - raising academic expectations by establishing more core required courses particularly in math, science and foreign language;

4. Behavioral Standards - specifying higher expectations for student behavior;

5. Graduation Requirements - detailing increased requirements for receiving a high school diploma;

6. Resources - directing professional and fiscal resources toward those students who are likely to make a significant contribution to society;

7. De-Regulation - relieving schools from "burdensome regulations" which foster unproductive paperwork and take professionals away from instructional activities;

8. Teacher Empowerment - ensuring teachers a greater role in educational decisions relating to their classroom and school;

9. Local Control - providing parents and communities increased opportunities to select school options and make decisions about how schools are managed; and

10. Principals - establishing greater autonomy for principals as key decision makers responsible for maintaining school climate and organization.

Impact on Special Education

One would be hard pressed to argue that higher standards, clear educational goals, teacher empowerment or building-based leadership are, in themselves, inappropriate. However, there is much in the literature which raises serious questions about the impact of these elements of school reform on students with disabilities (Braaten & Braaten, 1988; Hagerty & Abramson, 1987; Kauffman, 1989; Pugach, 1987; Sapon-Shevin, 1987; Shepard, 1987). There is deep concern that in an attempt to raise standards and, therefore, become competitive internationally, individual needs of "at-risk" students will not be met.

Although the traditional school reform model may achieve its intent of improving education for students in the top half of the performance continuum, it is exclusionary because for the reasons described below, the remaining students may be lost:

1. Given the growing political pressure on schools, students who do not succeed on standardized tests of national/state performance objectives not only face another failure experience but may also find themselves stigmatized for lowering school norms.

2. Increased required coursework in academic subjects will not meet the transition needs of many secondary students with disabilities and may force special education back to self-contained classes teaching a "watered down curriculum".

3. Rigid graduation requirements will reverse the trend of increased graduation rates for students with handicaps, further exacerbate already alarming drop out rates and may limit alternatives developed through Individualized Education Programs (IEP's).

4. Higher standards of school behavior will again result in students with social and emotional problems being suspended, expelled and pushed out of school.

5. The current problems of diminishing federal, state and local resources combined with higher expectations for student performance could result in money which was previously earmarked for "special" populations of high risk students now being put into "block grants" to be used at the discretion of school personnel.

6. Given negative attitudes toward disabled, minority and disadvantaged populations (Biklen, Ford & Ferguson, 1989), local control and autonomy could result in limited support and programs for these populations in many schools.

7. Deregulation is manifesting itself in federal and state requests for waivers of regulations. Although some requests are designed to allow experimentation with new service delivery models, most are thinly veiled attempts to limit identification of students with disabilities, restrict special education services and reduce funding.

It is clear that the exclusionary model of school reform can quickly have a devastating effect on the education of students with disabilities. It is, however, politically and professionally unacceptable to "just say NO". The President's "education summit" and resulting state and national activities demonstrate that the 1990's will see significant school reform and restructuring (Marsh, 1990). Special educators must discontinue debate among themselves: to be or not to be a part of "general education". Rather, a concerted effort must be made by advocates for persons with disabilities, both parents and professionals, to shape school reform in a way which will meet the needs of all students.

An Inclusionary Model of School Reform

In spite of within-group variance in terms of categorical affiliation, professional role and theoretical perspective, special educators do have a common data-base and shared attitudes regarding meeting individual needs. Based on these shared values, the outline of a model for school reform which is appropriate for all children can be developed. This inclusionary model is firmly anchored in the research on effective teaching and effective schools. In addition, it is equally appropriate for those in general and special education.

It is important to note at the outset that many of the "buzz words" associated with the operation of both the exclusionary and inclusionary school reform models are the same. Concern about objectives, assessment and exiting criteria are examples of issues relevant to both approaches. However, these models can be seen as poles on a continuum when the goals of each are analyzed. As Howe (1985) notes, the exclusionary model is intended to meet societal needs (i.e. a trained and competitive workforce) while the inclusionary model (Hewett & Wagner, 1989) is focused on meeting individual learner needs (i.e. each student fulfills his/her own potential).

What About REI/LRE

Much of the special education literature which looked at school reform has dealt with it in the context of the Regular Education Initiative (REI) debate (Teacher Education Division, 1986). Initially, REI encouraged parental requests for integrated placements moving professionals to again focus on least restrictive environment a decade after it became law under P.L. 94-142. REI, however, has now become a pejorative term with little practical meaning (Sapon-Shevin, 1988; Wiederholt, 1989). It creates much heated debate but does not help parents and professionals work collaboratively to integrate students with disabilities.

Educating students in the least restrictive environment (LRE) is the law. Almost all parents and special educators would agree that we must find more effective ways of implementing LRE but that no one type of placement is appropriate for all students with disabilities all the time at all ages. Of even greater importance is the notion that the REI/LRE debate itself is irrelevant if the exclusionary model of school reform prevails. For the reasons outlined previously, the regular classroom under the traditional model will not be the appropriate placement for most students with disabilities. Unless we deal with school reform for all students, the 1990's will see the pendulum shift back to pull-out programs for students who do not fit in an unresponsive general education environment (Sapon-Shevin, 1987; Toch, 1984).

School Reform For All

An inclusionary approach to school reform begins with the belief that school can meet the educational needs of all children and that all children can learn. There must be an acceptance of the value of each student regardless of academic ability, social behavior, race, class or any other label or group designation. Schools must be equally committed to meeting the individual needs of all students wherever they fall on the continuum of academic ability. School personnel with these beliefs will implement a school reform model characterized by adherence to the research on effective instruction and effective

schools, development of exit criteria which reinforce productive school learning, implementation of curricular alternatives which provide for the range of students in their classrooms, include options to serve all students in the community within the local school, and encourage building based leadership which takes responsibility for meeting the needs of the students in the school with particular focus on those with special needs.

Effective Teaching

Special educators have long believed that effective teaching for students with handicaps is effective instruction for all and the research literature supports their belief. Larrivee (1989) reported that teachers who were effective with mainstreamed students were likewise effective with the total classroom. Algozzine and Maheady (1986) emphasized the importance of effective instruction in their statement that,

> . . .substantial student improvements occur when teachers accept the responsibility for the performance of all their students and when they structure their classrooms so that student success is the primary product of the interaction that takes place there. And, that the gains demonstrated by effective instruction are not bound to the setting in which the teaching occurred or the label assigned to the student who received it. (p. 488)

In addition, two decades of teacher effectiveness research (Brophy & Good, 1986; Christenson, Ysseldyke & Thurlow, 1989; Good & Brophy, 1987; Slavin, Karweit & Madden, 1989; Stein, Leinhardt & Bickel, 1989; Ysseldyke & Christenson, 1987) has demonstrated that the following instructional factors foster achievement across the continuum of students:

- efficient classroom management
- positive classroom environment
- teaching goals and teacher expectations are clearly stated and are understood by the student
- an appropriate match between student characteristics and the characteristics of the instructional task
- clearly presented lessons which implement a demonstration-prompt-practice sequence and high student response rates
- explicit task specific feedback and corrective procedures are utilized
- instruction is adapted to meet individual student needs by monitoring performance and making the necessary adjustments to foster student achievement
- maintain high student academic engaged time
- frequent monitoring of student performance is characterized by assessing student mastery of specific objectives, keeping records of student performance and informing students of their progress.

These behaviors are observable and teachable. School reform advocates must encourage the preservice and inservice training of all teachers and administrators and expect schools to hire, evaluate and reward teachers based upon these critical instructional variables.

Although it is encouraging that good teaching for handicapped students is effective for all, one must acknowledge that progress with one group of students may, at some point, come at the expense of progress for another group of students within the same classroom (Brophy & Good, 1986). We will have to monitor and evaluate this potential dilemma as we pursue our goal of effective classrooms for all.

Effective Schools

The effective schools research (Archambault, 1989; Bickel & Bickel, 1988) reinforces some of the basic elements of the traditional school reform model. These include specification of school goals regarding student achievement, local autonomy, parental involvement, and collaborative management between teachers and principal. Other elements, are congruent with the effective teaching literature including instruction that maximizes learning time, monitors student progress and provides regular feedback to students and positive teacher-student interaction. Other characteristics of effective schools, however, assure that these elements foster learning across the academic spectrum.

One critical tenet of the effective schools research is high expectations for the performance of all students. This does not mean one performance standard for all but rather appropriate expectations for each student's growth. Other characteristics of effective schools are structured cooperative learning and flexible grouping (Maruyama, Deno, Cohen & Espin, 1989) which are based on individual assessment and which encourage interaction and social cohesion. If the principal assumes a leadership role which encourages the application of research on effective schools/effective instruction for students, a positive and inclusive school program will be accessible to each student regardless of ability.

Exit Criteria

Graduation should be a reward for students who have met the "high expectations" set by school personnel. There can be a variety of ways for students to demonstrate mastery of appropriate graduation requirements (Salend, 1990).

A. Curricular Approach. Students select a course of study related to their needs, abilities and goals (e.g. college preparation, general education, vocational, life management, individualized). Each curriculum has specific requirements and relevant assessments to identify mastery of competencies. A standard diploma is awarded to a student when mastery of the competencies is documented. A systematic approach to providing course waivers/substitutions within a specified curriculum can be part of this process as is typical at many postsecondary institutions (McGuire, Norlander, & Shaw, 1990).

B. IEP Approach. The IEP can be used as a vehicle for specifying a student's individualized plan of study for goal attainment and graduation and/or specification of any alternatives to standard graduation requirements.

Either of these approaches might be used for any student, not only for those students with disabilities. In each case the student's specific courses, grades and standardized scores (i.e. minimum competency tests) would be indicated on transcripts for review by potential employers or postsecondary institutions.

Curriculum

The alarming drop-out rate and problems with transition to employment for many disadvantaged, at-risk, urban and/or rural students supports the need for curriculum reform. The intent of curriculum reform is the same for both models; to prepare students for productive lives after schooling is finished. However, not all career paths require three years of foreign language or calculus. The key is to develop functional options to meet the needs of individual learners. The inclusionary model of reform can provide alternative paths for succeeding in adult life.

Biklen (1985) describes a functional curriculum where "we help both the student and the student's environment adapt to each other. ...This approach builds upon the things that a student can do and tries to adapt and adjust to take advantage of interests or skills" (pp. 83, 84). The typical college preparation track seems to fit this description as it prepares the student for the content and rigor of a college experience while helping the student focus on a major area of interest and ability. Although the college preparatory curriculum may need the development called for in the traditional school reform model, other curriculum options must be developed to meet the diverse needs of our school population.

Many students, disabled and non-disabled, require curricular options which are practical, community-based, and involve

real-life training. These curricular approaches should result in students who are more independent, better citizens and more employable than many general education students leaving high schools today. Options such as career education, vocational training and transition activities, which are being extensively offered to students with disabilities, can be effective with a large segment of our current school population.

Implementation

An attempt has been made to briefly outline elements of an inclusionary model of school reform which special educators could support and general educators would find relevant. The next steps would include further definition and discussion of the characteristics and merits of this reform alternative followed by discussion of its merits and attempts to implement and evaluate it in controlled settings.

Obstacles to Implementation

The time has passed for special educators to sit out the battles for school reform. As advocates for all students and particularly those with special needs, we must look beyond our differences and place ourselves at the forefront of the school reform movement.

Kauffman (1989) has documented the powerful efforts of the Reagan-Bush forces pushing for efficiency and excellence in ways

which do not serve students with disabilities. In fact, the issue of waivers of performance in which agencies are given time-limited waivers of certain rules and regulations is one of the most divisive political issues we face (Crawford, 1990; Gartner & Lipsky, 1987). Although there are requests for waivers (Education of the Handicapped, 1990) intended to evaluate school reform proposals, they result in increased polarization particularly between parents and professionals. In addition, they open another political front, further diverting attention from the larger school reform issues. Given that the effective political action of parents of youngsters with disabilities has for decades been the foundation of special education's political strength, we cannot afford to undermine it in these tenuous times. We, therefore, need to resist the granting of <u>any</u> waivers which would limit procedural safeguards or eliminate the continuum of services available to children and parents. Furthermore, as programs for students with disabilities face increasing competition for limited federal, state and local dollars, waivers and de-regulation could result in the loss of fiscal support for students with handicaps in whatever setting they are educated (Kauffman, 1989).

<u>Approaches to Implementation</u>

If the inclusionary model of school reform is to become a reality, advocates for individuals with disabilities need to broaden their political activity and influence. Specifically,

there must be a move to relate our concerns and school reform alternatives to general educators. We need to talk with teachers associations (local chapters of NEA and UFT), principals, school boards and parent groups about our proposals for school restructuring and reactions to the traditional approach to school reform.

We can broaden our influence by speaking of diversity not disability. Students with handicaps represent only 9.3% of the school population (Eleventh Annual Report, 1989) but students who are different (minority, disadvantaged, at-risk) represent 30, 40, 50 percent or more of many state or local school populations. From both a practical and political perspective we need to make schools responsive to the needs of this growing population.

Implications for Personnel Development

As we are propelled toward the twenty-first century, educators will require new approaches to pre-service training in order to prepare them for the challenges they will face. They will need skills for teaching students with a broad range of needs in integrated settings. Sensitivity to and acceptance of the multiplicity of races, cultures and abilities apparent in most classrooms will be critical to developing a positive learning environment. Willingness to collaborate with

colleagues from different disciplines and perspectives will foster the ability to make curricular adaptations and instructional modifications. Given that teacher education programs are slow to change and typically require internal (i.e. departmental, school and college curriculum committees) and external (i.e. State Department of Education, CSPD, legislature) approvals, it is necessary to begin the process immediately. We cannot continue to train and certify personnel who are not equipped to deal with the dynamic school environment in which they will work.

Teaching Personnel

We must establish a collaborative model of teacher preparation. Sapon-Shevin (1988) notes that "special educators and regular educators have jointly participated in a system that has divided and separated teachers in the same way that it has categorized and isolated students" (p. 106). Sapon-Shevin goes on to suggest that the lack of "parallel discourse" between the two, often distinct, teaching professions is an impediment to educational reform as it impacts the integration of students with disabilities. Others would agree that a lack of discussion among colleagues both within schools and within Schools of Education is a major hindrance to reform movements (Norlander, Shaw, Case, & Reich, 1990). Changes in the way we educate children must be preceded by reform in the way we educate teachers and ultimately in the way we certify teachers (Pugach, 1987).

This collaborative model should include regular and special education trainees participating in many of the same courses in an integrated teacher preparation program. At the early stages all students should be involved in clinical experiences in a variety of settings with divergent student populations. Seminars and supervision of clinical experiences should provide opportunities for both special and regular education faculty to share their expertise and perceptions across the spectrum of trainees (elementary and secondary, regular and special education). At the University of Connecticut we have had success with regular and special education faculty team teaching or cooperatively teaching courses. Specialized training for regular classroom teachers must include topics such as classroom organization, behavior management, prereferral interventions, cooperative learning, peermedia interventions, and other approaches necessary to succeed with a broad range of students in the classroom (Salend, 1990; Wiederholt, 1989). Specific "methods" training for special educators should include collaborative consultation, team teaching, communication and other skills necessary to be an effective member of an instructional team.

The issue of clinical training sites is addressed by Pugach (1987). She stresses that if prospective educators are going to develop their skills in the field, we must assure that the clinical sites are models of effective instruction and effective

schools. To that end, Schools of Education must form cooperative relationships with local schools. In this way, college resources can be used to develop and evaluate model program efforts in collaboration with the schools. Details of this approach have been provided by Calder later in this monograph.

Leadership Personnel

Leadership training programs can no longer train either teacher educators or researchers. If an inclusionary model of school reform is to be a reality, then future college professors and administrators must be data-based school practitioners. Doctoral programs must have integrated training, research and leadership/policy components. Ideally, doctoral students should be doing applied research in schools, addressing questions which will impact on school quality and effectiveness.

All of the school effectiveness literature identifies the principal as one of the most important elements to school reform. Local Board of Education members and higher education administrators are also key to enhancing access to public school and postsecondary education for all students. Leadership training programs providing knowledge, improved attitudes and skills to help these policy makers better serve the full range of students within their institutions would be most beneficial.

Leadership training programs are ideal vehicles for encouraging school reform, providing administrative personnel to implement reform programs and supervisory personnel to develop cooperative relationships in the schools. We need both college-based and school-based leaders who will educate, supervise and encourage the teachers for all required in the years to come. Hewett and Wagner (1989) said it best,

> Teacher heroics can and do exist, but both special and regular education reformers had better not take them for granted. They had better begin assembling the resources, supportive services and funding necessary to nurture and develop extraordinary teacher motivation and effort. For no matter what research studies and program designs have to offer, teacher competence, dedication, and yes heroics will be the ultimate determiners of successful reform in special and regular education. (p. 99)

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